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DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS
School of Medicine

Joshua Lederberg

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Dear Dr. Wurster-

Thank you for the material.

I have no information on mutagenicity of DDT. I would caution you on loose talk and misinterpretation, like the enclosed, which confuses selective effects (favoring better adapted genotypes) with mutation-induction.

In fact, our general methodology in this area is very bad. Before long every compound is going to flunk the leucocyte/chromosome breakage test, which may discredit the whole inquiry. By the same token we might have to inculcate coffee, and we would if we did not have a better understanding now of ~~the~~ mechanism of action of caffeine (an inhibitor of some enzymes of DNA repair) that rule out a simple extrapolation from high doses in laboratory experiments to low ones in human exposure.

A propos DDT, one of my deepest concerns would be its ecological impact, i.e., the selection for more resistant species of marine algae ~~xxxxxxx~~ which could have serious adverse effects long before we actually had to worry about the termination of photosynthesis.

Finally, I would be disappointed at a ruling that peremptorily forbade DDT. It ought to be licensed and regulated, perhaps even taxed to balance the merits with the costs. I am afraid this kind of blanket determination may set a very poor precedent for making a flexible response to other social irritations where your and my own preferences might be quite on the other side. The legal approach to marijuana is a case in point.

PS: Is the whole subject of DDT effects going to be reopened by differential effects of the o- and p- isomers?

Sincerely
Joshua Lederberg

Encs.